

"THE CORE HOUSE"
(Residence of Gov. Wm. Blount)
4 mi. N. Johnson City-U.S.Hwy-411
Washington County, Tennessee.

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Tennessee

Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Frazer Smith, District Officer
W. Jeter Eason-Deputy District Officer
404 Goodwyn Institute Building
Memphis, Tennessee.

"THE COBB HOUSE" (Residence of Gov. William Blount)
About 4 Mi. North of Johnson City, U.S. Highway 411
Washington County, Tennessee.

Owner. John Michael Massengill.

Date of Erection. 1770.

Architect. Unknown, if any.

Builder. William Cobb.

Present Condition. Very little care has been exercised in preserving the house and its only care has been such repairs and replacements as necessary for habitation. It is occupied now by a tenant farmer and his family all of whom are necessarily poor and likewise almost illiterate. The house does not give the impression that it did after erection due to the fact that it has been completely covered with clapboard siding, just the date of the application being unknown, however, it appears that the siding was added probably about 1810 to 1825, maybe a little later. The siding was applied over sized logs with dove tailed joints, and, we presume, mud chinking. As said before, no attempt has been made to maintain it as it originally was and it has settled badly in many places causing the windows and doors to operate with the greatest of difficulty, and has been allowed to become over-grown in weeds and trees so that it is hardly noticeable from the road. No apparent major changes have been made other than the replacement of the roof which is now metal and which was originally hand split shingles.

It was built on the side of what was then the Washington Post Road and certain rock and tree stump remains vaguely, but definitely mark the path of the road in front of the house. This Washington Post Road was the link between the City of Washington and what was then the Chickasaw Bluffs, now the City of Memphis. The new highway did not follow the old road but lies in front of the house about a quarter of a mile, on which is now placed a marble monument with bronze tablet giving some historic facts and calling attention to the place. This monument was placed there by the Daughters of the American Revolution, and is the only attempt which has been made to preserve the memories of the place. With its present lack of interest on the part of the owner and tenant, it is obvious that the marker will stand long after the house has fallen into the ground.

Number of Stories. The major part of the house which is rectangular shaped is two stories. The service wing to the rear is one story.

Materials of Construction. Foundations are of native stone both for the house and for the brick chimneys. The exterior walls are of logs covered now with clapboard siding. Interior partitions are of wood with wood finish. The roof originally was of hand split shingles, now replaced with galvanized iron. Chimneys are of hand made brick. No interior trim of any importance.

Other Existing Records. "History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee", published by the Parthenon Press of Nashville, 1936, for the Garden Study Club of Nashville, gives a very good account of the house and just who were associated with it, many of their facts being taken from Kirkpatrick's Manuscript, R.P.L.Cobb and William Cobb - "History of Governor Blount". The house is located in Sullivan County near Kingsport in "The History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee". This is in error as the house is in Washington County near Johnson City. Private manuscripts in the possession of Judge Sam Williams of Johnson City and the Massengill Family also contain information relative to the house.

Additional Data. While the names of Cobb and Massengill are closely associated with this house, and while it was built by William Cobb, the most important historic connection this house bears is the fact that it housed Governor William Blount from 1791 to 1792 during which time Governor Blount ruled the then southwest territory, and which was the first organized form of government in the territory, part of which is now the State of Tennessee. While the Blount Mansion in Knoxville, Tennessee is sometimes alluded to as the cradle of the State, this house in which Governor Blount lived prior to his building his own mansion in Knoxville is in reality the true Cradle of Government of the State of Tennessee.

The Watauga Section of Tennessee which is the valley in the extreme northeast section of the State was the birth place of the State and from which the most romance emanated. It was the settling point of the first pioneers as they came over the mountains from North Carolina and down through the valley from Virginia from the east. Here was formed the Historic Watauga Association which existed from 1772 to 1778. This Association ruled and controlled the immediate territory called the Watauga Section and was, therefore, the first government west of the Allegheny Mountains. Later with the expansion

and in recognition of the great southwest territory it was, therefore, the center of that expanded territory, and, as said before, this old house, which is sometimes called "Rocky Mount", was the seat of government of this expanded territory.

The Cobb House was among the first houses built in Tennessee. William Cobb, the builder, was born in 1714, married Earsheba Whitehead, came to the Watauga Section in 1770 at which time he built his house. He signed "The Articles of Watauga" in 1772, and was also one of the Commissioners in 1780 "To be Judge and Viewers of the Currency of the Realm". He was one of the twenty seven magistrates appointed to the first Washington County Court in 1777.

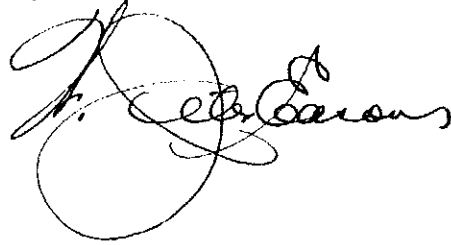
On August 7, 1790 President Washington appointed William Blount "Governor of the Territory South of the Ohio River". On his arrival in the Watauga Section and having no time in which to build a home of his own accepted the hospitality of William Cobb and set about organizing the territory over which he was to govern. The high standing in his community and the simple, but cordial, hospitality of William Cobb is spoken of in "Ramsey's Annals", and it was only fitting that he should offer his house to Governor Blount and that Governor Blount should accept the offer.

We do not know very much history associated with the house after the departure of Governor Blount and the death of William Cobb, but the house has remained in the hands of the descendents of William Cobb to the present day, and its owner, Mr. John Michael Massengill of Johnson City, is a great, great grandson of Penelope Cobb and Hal Massengill. As it was among the first houses to be built in the State of Tennessee it was likewise among the earliest to have a garden. It is said that the garden was well designed and carefully laid out and was noted for its orchard of apples, cherries, plums, pears and quince, and its large varieties of flowers, shrubs, etc.

The house and garden occupy an imposing position being high above the surrounding territory giving a commanding view for several miles. The name "Rocky Mount" was given the house because of the craggy rock formation which projected there, and for that matter still does rise above the ground to convey a hard, cold and awesome atmosphere.

If it should be possible to preserve any of the houses

and buildings of historic importance, this house is certainly one which should be included. It is not particularly inspiring architecturally, but it is certainly typical of the houses built at that time and typical of the construction which was necessary in view of the limited building materials and the limited ability of the craftsmen and pioneers who preceded the Artisans who came after the opening of the territory, and when there was a greater security and opportunity for skilled craftsmen. It is inspiring, however, when the obstacles that presented themselves are considered and when it is realized that a new territory was being born.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. Carson". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops and a prominent initial "R".

Rev. Sept. 18, '36 - THW.